

THE COSMIC TEETH

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II. Flame Teeth and the Teeth of the Sun

EVERYWHERE and always fire has been conceived as something that consumes, devours or eats like a hungry animal or human being; and the more or less individualized flames of fire are sometimes viewed as teeth, but more commonly as tongues.

In the very ancient Hindu *Rig-Veda* the god Agni primarily represents ordinary fire, but secondarily the fiery sun; and there it is said that "He crops the dry ground strewn (with grass and wood), like an animal grazing, he with a golden beard, with shining teeth" (Mandala V, Sukta VII, 7; translation of H. H. Wilson, Vol. III, p. 247), while his light "quickly spreads over the earth, when with his teeth (of flame) he devours his food" (*Ib.* VII, iii, 4; Wilson's, Vol. IV, p. 36).⁷

The Mexican goddess of devouring fire is called Chantico ("In-the-house," with reference to her character as divinity of the domestic hearth) and also Quaxolotl ("Split-at-the-top," for the flame divided into two tips) and Tlappalo ("She-of-the-red-butterfly," perhaps from the flame-like flickering of the insect). Her image is described by Duran with open mouth and the prominent teeth of a carnivorous beast; and she is associated with the dog as a biting animal, according to one account having been transformed into a dog as a punishment for disregarding a prohibition relating to sacrifices (Seler, *Vaticanus B*, p. 273; Spence, *Gods of Mexico*, p. 283). According to Sahagan (1829, *Historia General de las Casas de Nueva Espana*, IV, xxii), the Mexicans looked upon the dog as the fire-god's animal and the emblem of fire; and the Maya name

⁷ In a modern poem, *circ.* 750, a blacksmith's forge is personified as a fire-breathing monster with "sharpe teeth," which neither brass nor steel can resist (R. O. Cambridge, *Archimage*, stanza 71).

for the dog means "the biter"; on Maya monuments the dog is often seen spewing fire from its mouth, and flames are sometimes figured coming from the mouth of Chantico (Seler, *op. cit.*, p. 157 and fig. 474, p. 229).

In the Mexican *Codex Telleriano-Ramensis* (fol. 21, verso), Chantico is represented with three large upper anterior teeth, curved and pointed (Seler, *ibid.*, fig. 534, p. 275); and as her face is in profile, doubtless all six of her upper anterior teeth (centrals, laterals and canines) were conceived to be of the same type. In the *Codex Borgia*, however, Quaxolotl (in profile) shows three large but normally shaped incisors in the upper jaw (sheet 60), and in the same manuscript another fire-goddess, Itzpapalotl ("Obsidian-butterfly"), has three such teeth above and three below (sheet 11). Also in the *Codex Borgia* (sheet 69), the fire-god Xiuhtecuti ("Lord-of-the-year") appears with four moderately large upper teeth; but he seems to have been associated especially with the solar fire (H. H. Bancroft, *Native Races*, Vol. III, p. 114; Spence, *Gods of Mexico*, p. 278).

The ancients often considered the sun and the sun-light to be golden (for yellow), and in various ways associated gold with their solar figures, whose teeth are sometimes described as golden or composed of gold. Thus Agni with the golden beard and shining teeth (see above) is also described as "golden-toothed, bright-coloured, wielding (flames like) weapons" (*Rig-Veda*, V, ii, 3; Wilson's trans., Vol. III, p. 235), and Savitri is the "golden-handed, golden-jawed" sun-god who "rises regularly at the close of night" (*Ib.* VI, X, 1; Wilson's Vol. IV, p. 18). Again, the Scandinavian sun-god Heimdall ("Lord-of-the-home"; i.e., the earth) is called the God-toothed (Gullintanni) and is said to have teeth of pure gold (*Younger Edda*, I, 27).

The concept of the golden teeth of the sun was doubtless known to those who fabled that Harold Hildetand, King of Denmark, in the eighth century, had golden or gold-covered teeth, to which the origin of his surname was erroneously referred. According to Saxo Grammaticus (thirteenth century, *Gesta Danorum* or *Historica Danica*, VII, p. 247), some declared that Harold's surname was obtained "on account of a prominent row of teeth," which is the true explanation, as "Hildetand" really means "War-tooth" (from Danish *hilde*, "war" and *tand*, "tooth"). But Saxo also gives a

variant explanation, referring the origin of the surname to a legend that two new molars grew unexpectedly in Harold's mouth, in the place of two that had been knocked out by a cudgel; which explanation has been recognized as suggested in connection with a fanciful derivation of "Hildetand" from the Danish *hylle*, "cover, and *tand*, "tooth" (See O. Elton, 1894, *The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus*, Note, p. 297). There is nothing in Saxo of the teeth as conceived to be "covered" with gold, but in the Danish *Sogubrot af Fornkonungun* (p. 5) it is said of Harold: "this mark was on him, that the teeth in the front of his head were large and gold-color was on them [i.e., covered] them." It is possible that Harold's teeth were naturally very yellow or encrusted with yellow tartar, or both.⁸

In an old Welsh bardic text, the pestilence known as "the yellow plague of Ross" (of the sixth century A. D.) is personified as "a most strange creature" that came from a sea marsh, "his hair, his teeth and his eyes being of gold" (*Mabinogion*, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest, p. 485). A somewhat similar concept is that of the nixes or water-sprites of Teutonic mythology, who inhabit lakes and rivers and are sometimes described with green hair and green teeth (T. Keightley, *Fairy Mythology*, ed. 1850, p. 258); and the country people of the north of England have a murderous "water-boggart" known as Jenny Greenteeth, who lurks in the green vegetation of stagnant ponds and has green hair as well as green teeth (C. S. Burne, 1883, *Shropshire Folk-lore*, p. 79; J. M. Mackinlay, 1893, *Folk-lore of the Scottish Lochs and Springs*, p. 158, and others). Harold Blaataand ("Blue-tooth"), King of Denmark in the tenth century, doubtless had remarkably blue teeth (See especially the *Saga of Olaf Trygvason*, edition 1911, p. 34, and T. Carlyle, 1875, *Early Kings of Norway*, p. 24 sq.).

⁸ That the ancient Romans, sometimes covered defective natural teeth with gold caps is evident from one unearthed at Satricum, the cap in this case being connected with loops of gold to hold it in place by encircling the adjoining teeth (See V. Guerini, 1909, *History of Dentistry*, p. 101); and similar caps of both gold and silver seem to be mentioned in the *Talmud* as worn by women and easily removed (*Sabbath*, fol. 64 b, 65 a; *Nedarim*, 66 b). The earliest known gold tooth-cap independent of supporting loops and permanently attached was inserted about 1593 in the mouth of a Silesian boy and exhibited as a golden tooth of natural growth—the most celebrated hoax in history (See especially W. Bruck, 1915, *Die Historie vom Guldnen Zahn*). In 1673 a three-year old boy of Vilna in Poland was reputed to have a golden tooth, which proved to be only a natural one covered with yellow tartar (See A. Serres, 1817, *Essai sur l'Anatomie et la Physiologie des Dents*, p. 169).

In the *Bhagavad-Gita*, one of the books of the *Mehibharata*, Krishna as the macrocosmic pantheos is described with a wild exuberance of Oriental exaggeration, some of the mythic elements being utilized in metaphorical statements. Thus the macrocosmic Krishna is described with many arms, legs, eyes, mouths and other members, including "rows of dreadful teeth" (originally for the many biting rays of the tropic sun, in all probability); and in his character of destroying Time, it is said to him that even the rulers



THE MAYA TREE OF LIFE.
(From the Codex Cortesianus)

of the land and the leaders of the army "seem to be precipitating themselves hastily into thy mouths, discovering such frightful rows of teeth, while some appear to stick between thy teeth with their bodies sorely mangled" (Ch. xi).

In the Egyptian text generally known as the *Litany of Ra*, that sun-god is represented as both the panethos and macrocosmic deity, and is said to be Nehi, who is described as a fire-god (I, 71). Budge leaves the name Nehi untranslated (*Gods of the Egyptians*,

Vol. I, p. 347), but Naville renders it "He who is armed with teeth" (*Records of the Past*, Vol. VIII, p. 112).

Pushan is a very ancient Hindu sun-god who has his teeth knocked out and replaced shortly after losing them. De Gubernatis recognized him as "the sun which enters into the cloud or darkness of night" (*Zoo, Mythol*, Vol. I, p. 409). In the *Rig-Veda* he is called *adantaka* ("the broken-toothed" or "toothless"—IV, xxx, 24, Wilson's translation). In the *Mahabharata* he is a god "having a thousand rays, who, after warming the earth, goes to the western mountain at the close of day" (V, CLXXIX, 30); and in that ancient epic there are several allusions to the story of his teeth which were broken and knocked out by Rudra or Siva (identified as the same deity, probably for the moon) when he attacked the other gods while they were offering "Daksha's sacrifice." Nothing definite is known of this mysterious rite; but it is evidently of a mythic nature and connected with the thunder-and-lightning storm. Enraged because he was not invited to the sacrifice, Rudra-Siva destroyed the offering with his arrows (the lightnings); broke the arms of Savitri (the solar flabelli); plucked out Bhaga's eyes (the stars),⁹ and broke and knocked out Pushan's teeth (his "thousand rays" of light and heat). The vault of the sky cracked and the trembling earth was covered with darkness and threatened with destruction; but the frightened gods shortly succeeded in pacifying the angry Rudra-Siva, so he restored the arms of Savitri, the eyes of Bhaga and the teeth of Pushan, and also the sacrifice itself, "and the world was once more saved" (*Mahabharata*, VII, ccii; X, xviii; XIII, CLX). In the Puranic accounts of this event, Rudra-Siva is replaced by his manifestations, the Rudras (storm figures). According to the *Taittiriya Sanhita*, Pushan broke his teeth while attempting to eat part of a sacrificed offering after it had been pierced by one of the arrows of Rudra; and some late accounts have it that he remained toothless and ate only soft food, so the cooked oblations offered to him contained nothing hard (See J. Dowson's *Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*, s.v. Pushan).

The name of the Hindu god of wealth, Kuvera (or Kubera) is from two Sanskrit words signifying "vile" and "body," alluding to the deformity of the god, "who is represented as having three legs and but eight teeth," according to H. H. Wilson's *Sanskrit-*

⁹ See the present writer's "Cosmic Eyes" in *The Open Court*, Vol. XXXII, p. 685, and "Cosmic Hands," *ibid*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 8.

English Dictionary (1819, s.v. Kuvera). This statement regarding the legs and teeth, which is followed in nearly all subsequent accounts of Kuvera, seems to have been derived from some little known Purana of late date, as it is not found in any of the earlier accounts of the god. In all probability Kuvera was originally a figure of the sun in the lower regions, like the Greek god of wealth, Ploutos, whose name was at first a surname of Hades; and there can be little doubt that the former's legs belong to the three divisions of the underworld, while his teeth represent his fiery light radiating toward the $2 \times 4 = 8$ points of the compass.¹⁰

The longest and most formidable teeth of carnivorous animals and most of the primates (monkeys, apes, human beings, etc.) are the four canines or tusks, sometimes called "the master teeth"; and canines of exaggerated size are often represented protruding from the mouths of anthropomorphic monsters such as the Gorgones and the demons or devils of various peoples.¹¹

The four canines of Gautama Buddha were generally recognized as the most important of the few body relics rescued from his funeral pyre. An early legend of these relics, in which the teeth are not mentioned, is found in the *Mahavamsa* (XXXI, 17-19), where it is stated that Buddha foretold on his death bed that his body relics would be divided into eight portions, one of which would be adored at first by the Koliyas in Ramagama, whence it would be

¹⁰ Schellhas recognizes the Maya God G, as the sun-god, ("Deities of the Maya Manuscripts," p. 27), and Spence says that this god is represented with pointed teeth, and that his hieroglyph is a circle enclosing four such teeth ("Gods of the Maya," in the *Open Court*, Vol. XL, p. 71). But Spence is evidently mistaken in regard to the hieroglyph, for Schellhas shows that it "contains as its chief factor the sun-sign Kin," a circle with four symmetrically placed signs within it and joined to its circumference, these signs often having the shape of denticles or little pointed teeth, doubtless for the four directions in space, thus:



¹¹ The four teeth extracted from the mouth of the slain Sultan of Bagdad in the thirteenth century romance of Huon of Bordeaux were probably the four canines originally, though said to be "great teeth" and "great molars" in the extant version of the story (xviii, xxvii); for the canines are the chief weapon teeth, and the extraction of the Sultan's teeth appears to have been suggested by a figurative use of "drawing one's teeth" for "depriving one of the power to injure."

taken by the Nagas into their kingdom, and finally be enshrined on the island of Lanka. The eight portions were allotted to as many places in India, corresponding roughly to the eight points of the compass. Ramagama of the Koliyas was in Nepal, to the north; the Koliya tribe being related to that of the Sakyas, to which Buddha belonged, also in Nepal. In the *Mahavamsa* text, as often elsewhere, the term Nagas is applied to human enemies; but it is otherwise a designation of the inhabitants of the underworld, who are sometimes conceived in the form of serpents. Lanka is the Sanskrit name of Ceylon.

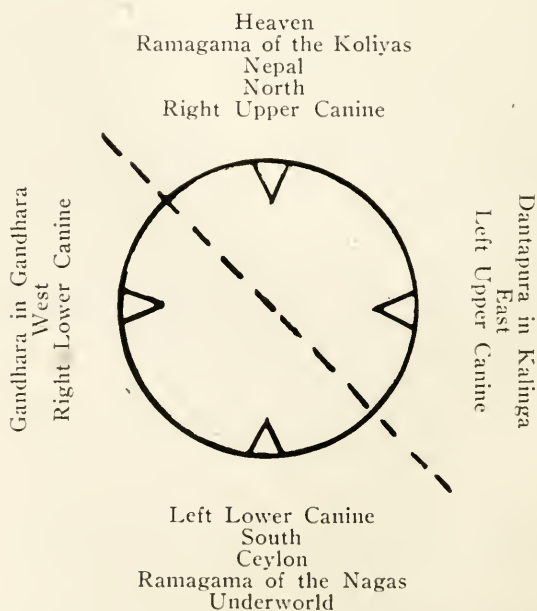
The *Maha-Parinibbana-Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* closes with two variant accounts of the body relics of Buddha, both being additions to the original work, according to the Pali commentator. In the first account there are ten portions of relics, but no mention of the teeth. In the second account, in verse, the teeth are the most important of the relics, which are divided into eight portions, with seven of them worshipped in Jambudipa and one by the Nagas in Ramagama. The word Jambudipa is sometimes applied to the whole earth, but here and elsewhere it is India as the principal part of the earth; and the Ramagama of the Nagas is in the underworld, as noted by E. J. Thomas in his *Life of Buddha*, where we have a close translation of the account now under consideration (p. 159). A variant translation by Rhys Davids is found in his English version of the *Sutta* (in *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XI, and *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, Vol. III, Part II). The account continues as follows (VI, 28), according to the rendering of Thomas:

“One tooth by the Tidiva gods is worshipped
 [i.e., in heaven, as in Rhys Davids’ translation],
 And in Gandhara city one is honoured;
 In the Kalinga raja’s realm one also
 [in Dantapura, ‘Tooth-city,’ capital of Kalinga],
 Another still the Naga rajas honour
 [in Ramagama of the Nagas, in the underworld].

The ancient city of Gandhara was in the country of the same name on the west bank of the Indus, above Attock, in the north-western part of modern India; and the Kalinga realm lay along the Coromandel coast, north of Madras, on the southwestern side of modern India. In all probability the Gandhara tooth was rec-

ognized as belonging to the west and the Kalinga tooth to the east, and there is a further probability that the tooth in heaven was originally allotted to the north of India (Nepal), while the one in the underworld was originally allotted to the south (Ceylon). The allotments in the text are in accordance with the ancient location of the heaven of the gods above the northern quarter or top of the celestial sphere, with the underworld realm in its lowest or southern quarter. In the probable allotment to the four quarters of the earth, the four teeth correspond to the four "great kings," the guardians of the world, who belong to the four quarters of the heaven, according to the *Mahāvamsa*, (XXX, 89).

In the commentary on the *Maha-Parinibbana-Sutta* and in the *Burmese Life of Buddha* (translated by Bigandet, II, iii), it is stated that the right upper canine of Buddha was taken to heaven; the right lower canine, to Gandhara; the left upper canine, to Kalinga, and the left lower canine, to the Naga realm. The mouth positions of these teeth are indicated in the following diagram in connection with the two variant allotment schemes considered above:



The best known of the tooth relics of Buddha, and the only one

that can be considered further in our limited space, is said to have been deposited originally in Dantapura ("Tooth-city").¹² There it remained, according to tradition, some eight hundred years, till the fourth century A. D., when it was removed to Kandy in Ceylon. Its marvelous early history is set forth at length in the Pali *Dathavamsa* (thirteenth century; translated into English by Bimala Charan Law, 1925), which is based on a lost Singhalise work written about 300 A. D. (See also J. G. da Cunha, *Mémoire sur l'histoire de la Dent-relique de Ceylon*, 1884). In the extant *Dathavamas*, the Dantapura-Kandy tooth is called "the left tooth-relic" of Buddha. The Portugese burned it midway in the sixteenth century, but the Buddhists claim that a substitute for the original was then destroyed. The tooth still preserved as the original, the most celebrated of all body relics, is generally described as four inches or more in length, and is supposed to have come from a prehistoric animal or to be merely a carved piece of bone; and some early travelers say that the original tooth came from a monkey, while others say from a horse.

In *Purchase his Pilgrimage* (1613; V. xi), the sixteenth century traveler Linschoten is cited for the statement that the Kandy relic burned by the Portugese was a tooth of the mythical ape Hanimant; which seems to indicate that the Brahmans at one time claimed it as such. Again, the Mohammedans of the thirteenth century seem to have claimed the relic as a tooth of Adam; for Marco Polo in his *Travels* (III, xxiii) tells us that the Saracens of his time declared that some of the hair and teeth of Adam were preserved in Ceylon,¹³ and that Kublai-Khan the Mongol emperor made a demand for the relics and received a part of the hair and two large molar teeth.

In the texts relating to the tooth relics (four canines) of Gautama Buddha there is nothing to indicate that he was conceived with more or less than the normal number of human teeth; but

¹² The pre-Buddhist Dantapura was perhaps a market for ivory, with its name referring to elephant's tusks.

¹³ The celebrated footprint of enormous size on Adam's Peak in Ceylon is claimed for Buddha by the Buddhists, for Adam by the Mohammedans, and for Saint Thomas by the Christians. It does not appear that either the tooth or footprint of Ceylon has ever been claimed for Jesus; but prints of his feet are shown in Rome, Jerusalem and elsewhere, and one of his milk teeth had some celebrity as a relic in France in the eighteenth century, while teeth of the Virgin Mary and various Saints have been adored from early Christian times (See G. Dagen, *Documents pour servir à l'Histoire de l'Art Dentaire en France*, pp. 33-40).

according to other Buddhist texts, one of the thirty-two signs that marked Gautama and other Buddhas as supermen was the possession of forty teeth in the temporary set. A similar and much older concept is found in the *Mahabharata*, in the description of the men of Cetadripa ("White Island"), a mythical paradise in the Ocean of Milk far to the north. These white and sinless men (or supermen), adults who require no food, have great strength; bones as hard as adamant; eyes that never blink; a multiplicity of tongues, and sixty white teeth, including eight canines (*Marab.* XII, cccxxxvi, 8). Here we evidently have, in a round number, a simple doubling of the normal human permanent teeth; and as all the thirty-two signs of a Buddha are discernable immediately after his birth, we may safely conclude that his forty teeth represent a doubling of the normal twenty or the temporary set (each in duplicate, with eight canines). This seems to imply an original doubling of the thirty (properly 32) teeth of an adult Buddha, as in the case of the adults of Cetadripa; but there is no statement of the kind in extant Buddhist works. Furthermore, it is possible that the signs of a superman were originally fixed at thirty-two as a typical complete number suggested by the full normal complement of the permanent human teeth.

The earliest extant accounts of the thirty-two signs of an infant Buddha appear to be found in the *Mahapadana Suttanta* of the *Digha Nikaya*, where it is related that these signs of a superman were recognized by a Brahman soothsayer in and on the body of Vipassi, the first Buddha, shortly after his birth (in *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, Vol. III, Part II, pp. 14, 15). In the *Lakkhana Suttanta* of the same work (*S. B. B.*, Vol. IV, Part III, pp. 137, 162), Gautama Buddha describes the signs, and is said to have acquired them through his virtues in former lives. In both texts the signs are described in substantially the same words, in verses evidently derived from some older work. The signs include a complexion the color of gold (the solar color); a large white mole between the eye-brows (instead of the third eye of some cosmic figures), and the forepart of the body like that of a lion (a solar animal, Gautama being elsewhere called "the lion of the Sakyas"). Of a Buddha so marked it is said (in the words of the *Lakkhana Suttanta*, as translated by Rhys Davids, who has "eye-teeth" for canines):

“His jaws are as a lion’s;
He has forty teeth,
Regular teeth,
Continuous teeth.
The eye-teeth are very lustrous;
His tongue is long.”

The thirty-two signs appear with minor variations in many later Buddhist works, in some of which it is not clear that the forty teeth belong only to the temporary set. But it is always evident that they are conceived in the normal arrangement of a single row in each jaw; and in all probability a Buddha was originally fabled to have been born with all the thirty-two signs, including the forty teeth, although it was supposed by some in later times that the teeth were seen in the infant by anticipation, through the aid of a seer’s supernatural eyes (S. Hardy, 1860, *Manual of Buddhism*, p. 148). The jaws but not the teeth of the infant are like those of a lion, which animal has only thirty permanent teeth.

Some of the stars in some constellations seem to have been conceived as teeth in Egyptian mythology. Thus one of the forty-two Assessors or judges of the dead (probably constellations) is addressed as “thou whose teeth shine” (*Book of the Dead*, Theban, CXXV, 12, trans. of Budge); and the teeth of the deified deceased “are the souls of Annu” (in some part of the heaven) according to a very ancient text (Pepi I, 576; in Budge, *Gods of the Egyptians*, Vol. I, p. 109).